DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 162 282 CS 004 486

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TITLE An International View of Primary Reading Practices.
PUB DATE [77]
NOTE 41p.; Report prepared at Barry College ; Reproduced from best copy available

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$2.06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Beginning Reading; Class Organization; *Comparative Education; Early Childhood Education; Early Reading; *Foreign Countries; Parent Participation; *Reading Instruction; Reading Materials; Reading Programs; *Reading Research; Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

Data on beginning reading practices in 23 countries are presented in this report. Each entry provides information about the age at which children are introduced to reading; the methods, materials, and classroom organization used in the primary reading classes; and the involvement of parents and family in beginning reading activities. Selected European countries are discussed first, followed by the Scandinavian countries, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Next, selected countries in the Orient are examined, followed by three South American countries, India, Nepal, and Israel. Finally, several Third World nations are briefly discussed. (FL)

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AN INTERNATIONAL VIEW OF PRIMARY READING PRACTICES

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The United States is the leading country in the world in reading research, nevertheless there are valuable investigations dealing with reading made in other countries around the globe. Much interest in comparative reading has been created by the International Reading Association which holds a World Congress on Reading every other year in various cities (1966 - Paris, 1968 - Copenhagen, 1970-Sydney, 1972 - Buenos Aires, 1974- Vienna, 1976 - Singapore, 1978 - Hamburg), in addition to a yearly convention in the United States which always highlights comparative reading. Comparisons of reading and learning to read in different nations, cultures, and languages were fairly rare until recently. The phrase "comparative reading" was first officially used at the 1968 I.R.A. Convention when a paper was presented suggesting that the term "comparative reading" be coined to label a new area of research and study which was emerging in the field of reading (Downing, 1976).

In the mid - 1950's, William S. Gray, a pioneer in the field of reading, stressed the basic similarities of the reading process in different languages. Some authorities today feel that Gray overlooked differences which under closer scrutiny might prove to be of importance. Feitelson (1976) believes that : "Research results about the teaching of reading cannot be transferred with impunity from language to language. Each language has a unique configuration of the way in which spoken language is transferred to writing. Methods of teaching beginning reading will in each case have to be developed anew for this unique configuration." Malmquist (1975) feels that methods of teaching reading in one language cannot be transferred to another without careful experimentation and a full recognition of a variety of factors including the linguistic structures of the language in question. On the other hand, we must not lose sight of the great similarities between languages. According to Gray's (1956) eye movement studies of reading in fourteen different languages, the basic processes involved in reading are similar regardless of the structure of the language and the characteristics of the letters used.

Malmquist (1975) has recently pointed out that researchers in many countries now seem to be in agreement on some points of the development of reading. It is important that we be aware of areas of common ground in various countries. Some of the more general points of view on which there is substantial agreement are: (1) The development of reading ability is no longer looked upon as an isolated technical teaching problem. It is considered to be a phase in the child's total growth process, closely related to all- around personality development. (2) Since reading in the modern society is vital to an individual's ability to adapt to the environment, success or failure in attaining elementary reading proficiency may affect a child's entire behavior and general attitudes to life both in school and out. A failure in the early stages of learning to read may negatively affect a child's entire personality development. (3) Beginning reading instruction is considered to be of critical importance. Good habits are crucial in the acquisition of any new skill. Repetition is good only if what is being repeated is appropriate and desirable. (Malmquist, 1975). Although these statements are accepted by most teachers, they are often not followed in the practical teaching of reading.

Educators in various countries are aware that the first stages of learning to read are extremely important for future success in reading and in learning in general. There are several important factors to be considered when determining the best age for beginning reading such as the number of pupils in the class, the competence and experience of the teacher, the nature of the instructional materials and teaching methods, and the writing system and regularity of the language.

Although Malmquist (1975) has stated that the official age of entering school does not indicate when a child is introduced to formal reading, first grade usually means initial reading instruction. Certainly some children begin first grade already reading and others must spend a great deal of time on reading readiness activities. The age at which the majority of children are introduced to reading varies from country to country. In the

countries investigated, children enter first grade at age five, six, or seven. There is little known about the considerations behind the choice of age of school entrance in different countries. In most cases, these decisions were made a long time ago. At the present, there is a tendency in many countries to reconsider the regulations concerning the age one can enter school (Malmquist, 1975). In the following information on beginning reading in 23 countries, the major emphasis will be on the age at which reading is introduced to the child, the methods, materials, and classroom organization used in the primary reading class, and the involvement of parents and the home in beginning to read.

Selected European countries will be discussed first, followed by the Scandinavian countries, the U.S.S.R., the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. In these countries, practices and standards of living can be in some ways compared to practices in the United States. Next, selected countries in the Orient will be discussed followed by countries in Latin America, then India, Nepal, Israel, and finally some Third World nations will be mentioned.

In France, preschool is optional from ages two to six, however, Chiland (1967) states that most children attend some sort of preschool prior to first grade. Preschools are called "jardins d'enfants" (kindergartens) with a distinction between "ecoles maternelles", which are independent schools and "classes enfantines", which are attached to a primary school. In kindergarten, Chiland reports that children do reading exercises and play reading games, but the systematic teaching of reading is not a part of the curriculum. Debates over the best method of teaching reading have led to a situation where there is practically no example of a pure look-say or pure phonic approach. Most of the methods are eclectic and there is emphasis on reading for meaning. Some children learn to read when they are in the "ecole maternelle" depending on their individual differences,

and assistance and encouragement from home. The nursery schools are the most progressive of the French schools. They have been influenced by the New Education Movement. Here the children encounter a liberal, informal climate. Inizan (1967) states that in the French schools there is emphasis on individual needs and the child's own readiness to read and rhythm of learning. He emphasizes that learning to read must be adjusted to the child's own pace through classroom groupings. Malmquist (1975) has more recently stated thatmost instructional reading materials are written for use with the synthetic method.

The Ministry of Education in France has stated that materials used with the analytical method are made by the teachers. Basal reading series do not exist in France, however authors have produced a single volume rather than a graded series. There has been little effort to coordinate the writing and reading skills in a developmental program from one level to another. The International Reading Association's European office is in Paris. It appears that more current information should be available on reading in France. Several recent articles found dealing with beginning reading in France had not been translated into English.

French is one of the three major languages spoken in Switzerland, where recent reading test results of 890 Swiss first graders in Geneva found that girls were superior to boys in both decoding and comprehension. The sociocultural influence, which was weak at the prereading level, made itself felt as soon as reading was begun in first grade at age six. Hutin (1977), who reports this study, suggests smaller classes for children who come from "working-class" homes. Hutin also states that attending a preschool in Switzerland for one or two years before entering first grade has no apparent influence on reading achievement according to test results. He believes that the maturity of the child is of primary importance. The multiple languages

in Switzerland cause problems in learning to read, and although there are areas of Switzerland in which French, Italian, or German is spoken predominately, there is a great deal of overlapping from one language to another.

After World War II, reading in Austria was predominantly taught by stressing the technical skills, a method which, for all the practice and discipline, obscured the fact that only a few children actually used their reading abilities (Bamberger, 1972). Since that time there has been more emphasis on reading for enjoyment and enrichment. Publishing and disseminating children's books has become important, and there are a number of book clubs for young children in Austria. Bamberger (1968) states that it is the exceptional classes which have supplementary reading with interested, well-informed and alert teachers who are enthusiastic readers themselves. He believes that a first aim is not merely to teach reading, but to educate readers, and a second aim is a systematic introduction to the world of books as a means of continuous information and further education and also as an aid to developing a personal attitude toward life.

Children begin first grade at age six in Austria and Schenk-Danzinger (1967) states that reading readiness is usually not developed before this age. She reports that the alphabetic system and learning to read German requires a high degree of abstract thinking that has not developed before age six or seven. Individualized reading is an approach which is used often in Austria and certainly is in agreement with the philosophy of developing reading interests for lifelong reading and learning. There is much teacher storytelling to children and reading enjoyable books to the class. Picture books and easy books are provided so children may begin early in life to experience the joy of reading.

In Germany, children begin first grade at age six and often remain with the same teacher for four years in elementary school, where the average class size is 38. Children in first grade attend school only in the morning, and homework is considered important. Parent assistance and supervision is expected (Orlow, 1976). Illiteracy is nearly nonexistent in Germany and this is often attributed to the highly regular language. The materials and methods used in teaching beginning reading varies in the different states of East and West Germany. In East Germany there is only one official primer permitted, which uses an analytic-synthetic approach. In most of the states of West Germany, teachers may choose among methods and materials. In Bavaria, only primers with analytic approaches are recognized, and seven different primers are available for use (Malmquist, 1975). The basal readers use analytic approaches, and the newer ones are attractive and have vibrant illustrations. They do not have the hierarchical organization found in American basal series after grade three (Schwartz and Allington, 1977). A study of sex role stereotyping in German basals has discovered that, although there are more major roles assigned to females, and more career roles available, the male major characters still dominate. There does appear to be less sex bias in German basal readers than in American (Grund-Slepack and Berlowitz, 1977). German basals reflect a more international flavor than American.

The interweaving of reading and cursive writing is very strong in German primary grades. Often it is the German grammar that is the stumbling block with four cases and three genders. The regularity of the language is illustrated when noting the German children make only one-fifth as many mistakes involving vowels when reading as their American counterpart (Orlow, 1976). Although most German children are fluent readers by the end of grade two, there are children who have reading problems which are called Legastheniker. There is an emphasis on early diagnosis and remediation of these children (Biglmaier, 1971). It

appears that German children read better than they did two generations ago and this is attributed to better teaching procedures, especially using analytical methods and more children attending kindergartens and receiving assistance at home. Because reading is mastered by most of the population, more emphasis is placed on critical reading skills, literature and writing in higher grades.

Over two centuries ago, the first serious efforts were made to enlighten the so-called lower orders and eliminate illiteracy in Scandinavia. It is now taken for granted that all can read and write in these four peaceful, stable countries which have experienced increasing prosperity. It is felt that the disadvantaged must be provided with not only a mechanical, but a useful reading skill so that reading becomes an intellectual experience and good books are read for recreation (Jansen, 1967). Jansen states (p. 29): "The small Scandinavian countries simply do not have a sufficiently large population to provide enough people capable of running a modern community, if the best possible systematic education is not made available to every member of the community, therefore everyone should be made to continue to the highest possible level."

Children begin first grade in the Scandinavian countries at age seven, and many children have experienced preschool. One of the goals of education in Scandinavia is to socially upgrade the population through broader education while pupils are prepared for and educated for increasing leisure time. Another goal is to develop techniques that will teach children not only to answer higher level questions, but to read critically, ask questions, and appraise while reading.

In Denmark, where the written language is more irregular than in the other Scandinavian countries, the choice of method is left up to the individual teacher, however, usually the analytic approach is used to develop reading efficiency. The analytical

phase of instruction is based upon words presented visually to pupils along with a picture and pronounced by the teacher. By examining the orthography, the child discovers the individual letters which make up the words, while the letters are named by the teacher. Thus a balance between the analytic and synthetic methods is achieved. The lack of phoneme-grapheme regularity causes problems with some children in learning to read. Teachers encourage attempting a guess at unknown words and allow miscues (Larsen, 1967). Lundahl (1974) reports the use of split-half classes in Denmark to attend to the needs of the individual child. The groups are heterogeneous so the slow learners may benefit from instruction and integration with others. With 20 as the average class size in Danish elementary schools, the split-half classes allow for more teacher attention.

Austin (1976) reports that about 70 percent of the six year olds in Sweden attend preschool, and it is felt that preschool should not be a preparatory elementary school. Eve Malmquist, an active member and participant in the International Reading Association, who frequently writes on the topic of comparative reading, is a professor at the Teachers College, University of Linkoping in Sweden. He states (Malmquist, 1967) that,when children begin school at age seven with a preparatory period for the stimulation of reading readiness before formal reading instruction is initiated, a variety of methods, both synthetic and analytic,are used. However, more recently he wrote that most primary reading is based on synthetic methods (Malmquist, 1975). The letters and sounds are taught in connection with exploring specially composed pictures. Primary classes are limited to a maximum of 25. However, for the teaching of reading and writing, a teacher has a maximum of 13 children at one time in order to facilitate a diagnostic-prescriptive approach. Special arrangements are made for children with reading disabilities and Malmquist (1967) discusses these: school

maturity classes, remedial reading classes, reading clinics, special remedial reading with the classroom teacher, and classes for reluctant readers which involve a home-school program.

Gjessing (1967) reports that children in first grade classes in Norway spend two to five weeks on reading readiness activities, with emphasis on developing a sense of directionality and geometric form, vocabulary and concepts, as well as hand-motor coordination. Reading instruction in first grade is systematic and Douglas (1969) states that not more than five or six percent of the Norwegian children experience any major difficulty in the beginning stages of learning to read. Although the Norwegian language is highly regular, dialect differences are common. In the early phases of teaching reading, a synthetic approach is used, and then progress into an analytic period with continuing emphasis on phonics. Douglas also states that the reading program has tremendous continuity since the children have the same teacher for several years. According to him, this extended time factor tends to eliminate the pressures which lead to failure, and along with teacher and parental expectations, success will overcome failure and an appropriate atmosphere for significant reading growth will be created. Ekwall (1973) notes that children in Norway who do need remedial help are given it at an early stage rather than waiting until the problem becomes pronounced. Teachers in Norway have ranked the inability of students to read as last among various instructional problems.

Kyostio (1967), a professor of education at the University of Oulu in Finland, states that reading is not a problem in Finnish schools for two main reasons. The structure of the Finnish language has phonetic spelling and pronunciation of a grapheme does not depend on its place in a word; the phonic structure is simple, that is, there is a consistency of the accent on the first syllable. The other reason is that Finnish children do not start school until they are seven years old. There have been

a variety of studies in Finland designed to determine if preschool children can learn to read. These studies may be the result of the Esikoula concept, advocated by a 1970 Committee of the Government which encouraged advancing formal reading instruction to age six. Ylisto (1977) reports the results of a study of early reading responses of four, five, and six year old children in the Finnish Lastentarha (preschool) do not support the emphasis on a phonic approach to beginning reading instruction nor the importance of a highly regular orthography in the process of learning to read. The results challenge the belief that phoneme-grapheme regularity is a critical factor in the onset of reading. The study by Ylisto sought clues to the onset of reading, when beginning reading instruction focuses on a phonetic approach (tavaaminen) and when the language, like Finnish, has a high phonetic regularity. Synthetic methods have been used predominately in Finnish schools to teach beginning reading. Children first learn letters from a primer and combine them to make short words. The manuals to the primers resemble American basal reader manuals and most teachers adhere to the suggestions offered. Beginning reading instruction is mainly oral. A typical manual stresses talking, listening, singing, arts and crafts, field trips, and a variety of other creative activities.

Description of early education programs in the Soviet Union which lead to a high level of successful primary readers. Many children in Russia attend nursery school from the age of two and one-half months to three years, in a program emphasizing the internalization of external dialogue, concept development and developing a two-channel communication between the child and his environment. The kindergarten experience stresses vocabulary development through puppetry, games, and dramatics. There is no attempt to teach reading readiness through formal activities. Children are taught to compose sentences and then divide them into separate words and syllables. They also are familiarized with the book they will use in first grade - how to hold it, find a line, turn pages, etc. (Ungaro, 1974).

There are 130 national languages in the Soviet Union, with 46 basic languages used for school instruction. However, Russian is a consistent language and Durr and Hickman (1974) report that preschool teachers of five and six year olds stress proper speech habits, teach children to numerically specify word order in sentences, to break oral words into component syllables, and to recognize and isolate phonemes within syllables. Letter sound - symbol relationships are taught one at a time; no sight methods. Comprehension is developed through teacher-led discussion and questioning. It is estimated by the Ministry of Education that 50 percent of the children in cities can read before first grade.

Children begin first grade when they are seven and the first grader attends school for four hours, six days a week. Half of that time is devoted to activities which build reading abilities. The focus of attention is on the building of the spoken word from its component sounds. Letters are introduced in a sequential series of lessons, one sound to a lesson, in an order which research has shown to be best for ease of learning. All children use the same reading book and will complete it on a previously set date nationwide.

Early education in the Soviet Union stresses the realization of the beauty and purpose of language, the sound structure of words and broadening experiential background. As Bronfenbrenner (1970) discusses, students are given a firm foundation before first grade, and encouraged to develop positive feelings toward school and themselves. Most of the techniques used in the Soviet's early education program have been established by Russian research.

Formal reading instruction ends at the conclusion of grade three, but sequential skill development has ended by grade one. Children learn the essential parts of a book, but specific instruction for content area reading, varying reading rate, and other intermediate grade emphasis in the United States seem to be non - existent in the Soviet Union.

Reading is taught as a total class activity with up to forty students and seldom provide for individual differences. However, experimental materials consisting of the same text written at various levels of difficulty to allow for individual differences amid total class instruction are being tested.

Soviet authorities completely dismiss perceptual problems and low socioeconomic background as correlates of reading deficiency. Nevertheless, Soviet children do learn to read at an early age, and Ungaro gives the following reasons: consistency of language sound-symbol relationships; complete parental expectation that children will read; and the high esteem for education in Russia.

English is the most international of languages. It is the mother tongue, or first language, of 250 million people, and 100 million more have a working knowledge of English (Morris, 1975). Selected English speaking countries to be discussed are England, Scotland, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Downing (1967) reports that the general consensus of studies of reading in countries with a more or less regularity of phoneme-grapheme relations seem to be that the more simple and regular systems make it easier to teach reading, writing, and spelling than it is in countries where English is spoken. English tends to have complex and an irregular written code for its sounds. In encouraging the use of the initial teaching alphabet (i.t.a.), Downing states that the evidence is growing that the relation between the phonemes of the spoken language and the graphemes of the written language has very important effects on the development of literacy skills.

The United Kingdom is usually understood to include the countries of England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. It is not an educationally unitary state. There are separate services, and different methods and criteria for measuring reading attainment have been developed in each of the four countries.

The usual procedure in the United Kingdom is to admit children to infant schools at intervals of four months. They are promoted to junior school only at intervals of 12 months. Children must go to school at the beginning of the term after their fifth birthday and are promoted to the junior school in the September following their seventh birthday. The number of pupils in the infant school varies greatly from term to term and this affects the learning conditions (Goodacre, 1974). Morris (1969) discusses the reading section of the Plowden Report, which was a 1967 government report of primary education:

PLOWDEN REPORT

Education should be child-centered rather than subject-oriented.

Supports the concept of readiness-skills taught when the need for them is evident to the children, however, it does stress that teachers should structure the classroom environment to promote readiness.

Testing for readiness is not encouraged--official view: "the business of the school is not to test but to teach".

Encourages teacher to try all methods available to him/her and not to depend on any one method--the criteria for the selection of methods should be the age, interest, and ability of individual students.

Basal schemes should never determine the practices adopted for all children.

Concerning i.t.a.: "It is important to stress that even if methods are found which make possible an early beginning in reading, it does not follow that children's time is best spent on reading."

The Plowden Report Proposed Changes Related to Reading

Schools in poorer neighborhoods be given more money for reading materials--also extra remuneration for teachers in these areas.

Reorganization of all primary schools giving students an extra year of reading instruction in infant schools.

Extension of part time nursery education for children under five.

Neville (1970) maintains that the type of early education in England must change from child-centered discovery learning to a program devised specifically to teach reading readiness.

She also recommends a more structured Infant school program in contrast to the present program where children are free to follow their own interests in various creative activities. She describes a method of teaching reading in which each child reads individually to the teacher, who tells the child new words, helps him/her recall words he has already seen and sometimes suggests the use of context clues or discusses one or two phonics generalizations. Comprehension questions are asked less frequently. Southgate (1969) warns that in this freer atmosphere of infant classes, as proposed in the Plowden Report, if the children are to learn to read, three conditions must prevail: the teacher should know in detail the various stages child must master to acquire each skill; all reading materials should be structured as to form the major or perpheral arts of the master skill plan; and the teacher must keep meticulous records of pupil progress.

She recommends structured or programmed materials so that students are teacher independent; beginning with a Look and Say approach (colorful pictures to aid word recognition) and then, phasing in phonics skills; environment of literature structured to appeal to children at a wide range of reading levels.

Terry Johnson (1974), in comparing British and American reading instruction, reports and discusses John Downing's strengths and weaknesses of British Infant and Primary Schools:

Strengths:

Child-centered approach-- in contrast to most American schools where the child's learning is divided into segments and chronologically controlled.
Relative importance placed on learning to read in the child's total development.
Nongradedness of primary school.
Widespread use of language experience approach.
Reading instruction is integrated with other subjects and is thus perceived as functional and relevant.
Availability of book in infant school.
Local autonomy of British Schools, freedom of self-direction.
Change as an evolutionary process rather than revolutionary-- teachers are part of the change.
Early entry age -- five years.
Concern for the child's health and nutrition.

Weaknesses:

Relative lack of professional preparation in reading among teachers.

Almost complete lack of any systematic instruction in reading beyond the second year -- compared to the United States where reading is considered a long-term developmental task with coinciding instructional programs.

Inadequate help given children who come from culturally or linguistically different backgrounds.

Size of classes — 40 students per classroom is not uncommon.

Common practice of streaming according to group administered intelligence tests.

Inadequate auditory perception training.

Writing system -- traditional orthography instead of i.t.a. or color-coding system.

Lack of real contact between parents and school.

Lack of provision for reading disabled students.

Gardner (1976) has recently reported about the use of television in British schools to assist and encourage the development of reading skills. In the United Kingdom, 64 percent of the infant schools (ages 5 to 7), 96 percent of the junior schools (ages 7 to 11), and 91 percent of the secondary schools are equipped with television. Nearly one-half of the infant schools make use of the language programs available. These programs are designed to bridge the gap between prereading and reading for preschool children and beginning school children. Animated puppets and fantasy are used to introduce letters. The teaching is left to the teacher who has the television script with lesson suggestions.

The major approach that has been developed in England but has been used worldwide to teach children reading in English is Sir James Pitman's initial teaching alphabet. Although the Plowden Report did not recommend it, Downing (1967) has stated that i.t.a. is much more efficient in teaching irregular English, and that in England studies have shown that at least six months of the children's and the teacher's time is wasted by the use of conventional orthography in beginning reading instruction.

Early education in Scotland tends to be more formal than in England, with greater emphasis on phonics and oral reading, and with less accent on creative writing along with reading (Southgate, 1967). Children begin reading instruction in Scotland at age five. Scottish primers include special provisions for the application of phonics to reading (Elder, 1971). Malmquist (1975) states that 55 percent of the Scottish teachers provide systematic phonics instruction to their pupils in comparison with 18 to 22 percent of English teachers. Teachers are allowed flexibility in choosing methods and materials.

Beginning reading instruction in Canada is at age six when the child enters first grade. A 1970 (King) report states that there is not a federal office of education and, as a result, there is a lack of uniformity in educational programs across the country. Materials for developmental reading programs consist of basal readers with sequential skill development, integrated reading and language arts programs, and multisensory materials and literary series. Teachers are encouraged to use an eclectic approach, however, reading in French language schools is taught as a predominately phonic approach. Individualized reading is encouraged from early grades. Children with reading and learning disabilities usually attend special clinics in urban areas. Rural areas are visited periodically by mobile reading clinics. Many schools in Canada have corrective and remedial programs conducted by a reading specialist and continuation of developmental reading programs into higher levels is increasing. There has been a recent trend toward utilizing para-professionals in education in Canada. King also reports special problems due to the diverse cultural backgrounds including the French-English language barriers, the minority groups such as Eskimos and Indians who create difficulties in finding appropriate materials, and the large influx of immigrants from Europe and Asia.

Children in Australia are admitted to school in February of the year they turn six. Marshall (1969) reports that less than 20 percent of four and five year olds receive any kindergarten. A first grade readiness program in western Australia is described by Marshall which is developed to promote factors related to reading. The program covers a twelve week period and uses various activities with nursery rhymes to promote auditory and visual discrimination, language and manipulatory skills, social studies, music, physical education and mathematics. In this program children are encouraged to become independent, develop a sense of responsibility, and to cooperate in groups. Pretests are included as one means of grouping children. Higgins (1971) discusses the principle of readiness among Australian children. Some are reading, others are ready for a structured prereading program in first grade, and others are not, therefore children's individual differences are recognized.

Higgins also reports of a basal reading series written and published by the New South Wales Department of Education to deal with the culture. In the prereading book there is material for visual and auditory discrimination, and vocabulary development. Language experience is used quite a lot in Australia at the prereading level and comprehension and interpretation are stressed. There is a current trend toward pupil centered learning experiences rather than teacher centered instructional experiences (Anderson, 1971). O'Connell (1971) states that 5 to 15 percent of the children in Australia have reading disabilities, and there are too few teachers to offer special help to those with problems. It is usually up to the classroom teacher to remediate. It appears that analytic methods are used initially in Australia. After children learn words by sight, then phonics and other word analysis skills are introduced.

Tierney (1976) has recently completed a study comparing Australian and American primary reading teachers. The results show that Australian teachers displayed more teacher initiation,

teacher correction, teacher praise, and more oral reading, whereas American teachers displayed more questioning, teacher acceptance, and had more student responsiveness and silent reading. Australian teachers tended to be autocratic and their instruction was teacher centered whereas American teachers appeared indirect and child centered. Although many schools in Australia lack libraries and materials for recreational reading, parent volunteers have made great progress in their efforts to improve this situation (Anderson, 1971). Philp (1971) discusses researchers from Australia who have done studies in New Guinea which show that cognitive development is directly related to the structure of the language spoken by the child -- there is slower development and even somewhat different development when a language is less rich in those conceptual structures subject to measurement. These findings are directly related to language development, readiness, and beginning reading.

Children in New Zealand enter school on their fifth birthday, on the day the child turns five. The teacher received a cluster of children after summer vacation and then children are admitted on any day of the week throughout the year. This system is valued because it forces individualization of instruction in the first year of school (Clay, 1976). The influence of cultural diversity is seen in readiness skills and in learning to read in Auckland, where there are three main populations in the schools: the majority white population who are called Pakehas, the native Maoris, and the immigrant Pacific islanders who are mainly Samoan. The Maoris accepted the education offered by the missionaries when they arrived in 1814. They learned to read and write quickly and had a well- developed oral tradition of education. Each of the island groups in New Zealand has its own language, culture, and a different style of child - rearing related to a particular value system which makes for different reactions on the part of the children to what happens in schools. The

teachers must know the characteristics, the values and type of child-rearing which the various Polynesian groups use. Although the Samoans have high motivation to succeed, the Maori child's control of English is better than the Samoan, and the Maori child usually achieves to a higher degree in school than does the Samoan (Clay, 1971).

Neither phonics nor the basal reader is used initially. The emphasis is on comprehension, and reading for understanding precedes any instruction on decoding skills. Children's own stories and sentences are used from the beginning. After two months of language experience reading, those children who are ready for books move slowly through little stories like basal readers. There are many books on the same level for the children. Flexible grouping is a key to their success. The average child will take about six months to learn the early reading behaviors necessary for the move to book reading. Holdaway (1970) states that the New Zealand classrooms are much like those in Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. They have a relatively high level of literacy by western standards. Compulsory school attendance is required for ten years.

It is estimated that 70 to 80 percent of the four and five year old Japanese children attend preschool (kindergarten, nursery, or day care) (Namekawa, 1976). Although Hiragana is not formally taught in preschool, children are introduced to letters and books, so by the time children enter first grade at age six, most can already read. Children are read to from infancy by their parents and although picture books are not more than toys for babies, Namekawa states that the child will learn to open the books and look at the pictures by the end of his first year. Mothers of two and three year old children tell them folk tales and read picture books to them. Both parents and early teachers actively arouse interest in reading in young children. There is also a great deal of parent competition for their children to learn rapidly and to do well so they can enter good upper

schools.

There are four writing systems in Japan (Sakamoto, Takahiko, 1976):

> **Hiragana** is a set of 46 phonic symbols; each one stands for a single syllable that has no meaning by itself, but joins to form words. Most children learn prior to first grade.
>
> Katakana is used only to write foreign words that have entered the Japanese language, e.g. television. taught in first and second grades.
>
> Kanji involves ideographs (developed from pictograms) that originally came from China, 1850 characters. Each Kanji usually has several alternative readings that range from monosyllabic to quadrasyllabic sounds.
>
> Romanji is an application of the Roman alphabet to Japanese for the sake of foreigners.

Japanese orthography is a combination of Hiragana and Kanji. Most first grade teachers do not have to teach Hiragana, but just reinforce and confirm what the children already know. The Ministry of Education requires that 996 Kanji Characters be learned during the first six years of elementary school, and the following 854 during the three years of junior high school, so that all 1,850 are learned and used in the nine years of compulsory education from ages six to fourteen (Sakamoto, Takahito, 1976). Japan is proud of her high level of enrollment in schools and low illiteracy. One-half of the publications for children in Japan are books for preschool and early grade children. There are five national reading series and most schools use one series for grades one through six. The books become the child's possession and are taken home daily to study. Reading is integrated with the other language arts. The reading lesson using the basal is almost identical to the D.R.A. used in the United States, however, all children use the same book and reading groups are not used. Most classes have 40 to 45 children. Round robin and choral reading are used. Most comprehension questions are on the interpretation and evaluation

levels with little emphasis on literal and factual comprehension. The Kanji characters are introduced in a meaningful context with pictures. The teacher carefully demonstrates how to form the character.

Makita (1976) states that the incidence of reading disability is practically nonexistent in Japan. Less than one percent of the school population is considered reading disabled. This is partially attributable to the Japanese writing system which is less confusing in its cognition, and Makita believes that different perceptual processes are used in reading Kanji. Muraishi (1976) reports that the relationship between the amount and quality of letter instruction in kindergarten and the acquisition of reading ability led to the inference that language development of children is hastened through preschool education so that the increased reading ability in modern Japanese children compared with that in earlier children is due to improvement of preschool education, especially the fact that children now enter kindergarten at a younger age and that a larger percentage of them attend kindergarten. Certainly one of the main reasons for the reading ability among preschoolers and the success in reading in the early grades is the degree of parental involvement in Japan. The total family interest motivates children to learn and continue reading. Unfortunately, too much pressure by some educators and parents has led to suicides by young students, and illnesses, such as stomach ulcers, in preteenagers.

Japan has the highest level of literacy in the Orient. Many of the other countries fall far below the standards of Japan. In the Philippines there is much poverty and illiteracy, especially in the rural areas. Pilipino is the official national language, however, English is also spoken and taught in the schools. Villamin (1977) has reported that primary grade children read and speak better in Pilipino than in English. He also discusses the lab school for teacher training at the Philippine Normal College where most of the college students are bi-lingual.

There is also a low level of literacy and a great deal of poverty in Thailand. A study in Thailand reported by Philp (1971) shows that readiness was directly related to the familiar variables of social class and also to the level of cognitive development. Performance was directly related to the available conceptual structures. There are 44 consonants and 32 vowels in the Thai language. Pongnoi (1976) describes his job as a traveling reading teacher in the remote and mountainous areas of northern Thailand which can be reached only by foot. There are thirty cultures in this area, each with its own customs and dialects. The literacy rate is about one percent. He discusses in some detail the primitive life in these jungle regions where the people are yellow with malaria. Opium raising is the main income of the families, and there is a high death rate among children. Parents prefer to have their children help in the fields rather than go to school, and they are often uncooperative because the children frequently leave the area when they learn to read. The value of an education must be sold, and what is learned must be applied to everyday life. The language experience approach has been successful in teaching both the children and the adults.

Bertran (1973) states: "Illiteracy is an old and endemic problem which somehow alternately becomes a cause and an effect of many other difficulties in Latin America." The causes have historical, geographic, economic, social- political, and cultural origins. Latin America has a high illiteracy level, and with the explosive population, the number of illiterates is increasing. Bertran, who is with the Organization of American States, says that "an illiterate is not only one who does not know the letters of the alphabet, but also he is one incapable of extracting data which he needs to survive in a modern world." There have been massive literacy campaigns in Latin America that involve the entire adult illiterate population. At times adults have been compelled to participate in literacy programs. The literacy

campaigns have not succeeded in achieving their objectives because of their massive character. Today, UNESCO and the Organization of American States have developed programs to better serve the diverse populations. There is an improvement in methods of teaching and in developing suitable materials. Adult education is a first priority while attempting to improve the teaching of beginning reading to young children in the regular education system. The teaching of reading will be briefly discussed in the three Latin American countries of Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay.

Children in Argentina may begin public school at age four and today only five out of ten children finish primary school (Nervi, 1973). There are great variations in the speech in Argentina due to historic reasons linked to the Spanish conquest in the 16th century, and to the immigration policy in the 19th century (DeBraslavsky, 1973). The high level of illiteracy, malnutrition, and part of the country being technically underdeveloped are all big problems. Onativia and Donoso (1977) stress that it is of utmost importance to use a bilingual method for teaching reading in any county where there is serious interference between predominant dialects or interlanguages (this is when the language is distorted and intermingled with the dialect). An example is in northern Argentina with the Indians, and also in borderline communities. Such circumstances cause difficulties when children are taught to read and write. In addition to traditional methods of teaching reading, games, dialogues, dramatizations, pictures, and songs are used. Systematic teaching in meaningful situations is emphasized. DeBraslavsky (1973) states that the repetition of first grade reaches 40 percent in some areas of Argentina, but is only nine percent in the capital city. She also cites that surveys show that parents in Argentina consider their children's education a first priority even under the most unfavorable conditions.

Because of illiteracy problems in Brazil, the improvement of primary education is a priority. Goals in Brazilian education include expanding primary education throughout the country and also increasing the number of teachers and "lay-teachers". Brazil is a federate republic whose constitution has determined that primary education is compulsory for four years (ages 7 to 11) and that each state of the country must organize its own system of education. The National Law of Education states that every town must call the population between ages seven and eleven for enrollment in primary school. In 1964, only 66 percent of these children were in school (Lopes, 1967). It is admitted that the task ahead is gigantic, but better primary education is a goal toward eradication of illiteracy in Brazil. Lopes-Correa (1976) discusses MOBRAL, a reading method for adults in Brazil to attain functional literacy. He states that "acquiring a lasting literacy may change one's social and cultural outlook radically, and the new literate may then act upon his society."

In Montevideo, Uruguay, there have been concentrated efforts and intensive work with mothers and children. By enriching the environment, they have made possible a more complete expression of the children's "genetic potentials" (Garcia, 1973). There is an emphasis on teaching concepts and oral words expecially to disadvantaged children before reading instruction begins. Garcia feels that it is evident that parents must be taught how to teach, because "we are beyond the stage in which the teacher merely orients the parents." Education today must turn the parents into active agents in the learning process.

In India, 75 percent of the population is illiterate, and although the dropout rate in the primary schools is less than in earlier years, 414 out of 1,000 drop out of school before the fourth grade. Hindi is the national language, but India recognizes fifteen major languages spoken across the country, with 1,625 dialects, many with no written form. The schools are

committed to a three language formula: the regional language, the national language of Hindi, and English. The Hindi language is very complex. The verb has 17 forms and there is a gender for all objects (Chacko, 1971). There is an absence of adequate facilities, proper equipment, instructional aids, and textbooks. The library facilities are usually small collections kept under lock and key. Basic instruction consists of total group repetition of sentences read by the teacher to classes of 40 to 60 students. A basic textbook is usually available for each child for a nominal charge in all of the 15 major languages. Chacko (1967) reports that there is much to be desired in the quality and standard of reading books produced in India. Seldom is there coordination between the curriculum makers and authors who give little thought to the children who are to use the books. The vocabulary is not controlled in the basals nor repeated often enough, and the language tends to be very formal. However, there are studies which have been done on the functional vocabulary of preschool children, ages 3 to 5, to establish a need of preparing reading materials near the child's language (Srinivasachari, 1969).

The Hindi readers developed by the Indian government have listed, along with the basic vocabulary, seven dialect variants which the teacher can anticipate in children speaking those dialects and can use in helping children interpret standard Hindi. Malmquist (1976) states that the most prevalent methods of teaching beginning reading in Hindi are synthetic in which the initial emphasis is on letters and their sounds. The word, phrase, and sentence is then recognized by combining the detailed elements of language. Chacko (1971) states that teacher training institutions are separate from universities and there are no courses taught in teaching reading, nor provisions for training reading specialists. American reading educators, such as Constance McCullough, have assisted in developing materials and appropriate procedures for teaching beginning reading in India (Srinivasachari, 1969 and McCullough, 1971). Ardhanareeswaran (1977) states that in India,

English has to be efficiently learned for continuing education, and that it is a source and link to the acquisition of new knowledge.

Until 1951 there were only 200 primary schools, 21 high schools and one college in Nepal. Chacko (1969) reports phenomenal progress in the past 30 years, yet the number of facilities is still inadequate. The educational system takes care of only 28 percent of the primary school population, and except in 45 villages, primary education is not free. Of 13,400 employed teachers in Nepal, 10,000 are untrained who have at most seven years of schooling themselves. The physical conditions in most classrooms are very poor with 60 to 100 children in a class. Out of 5,000 schools, 2,000 have only one teacher. Less than one-half of the children who enter first grade go on to second grade. The government published basal readers lack variety, and there are no provisions in the books to help teachers teach reading skills. There are few materials available, however Chacko states that there is work on improving materials.

There are 30 distinct languages spoken in Nepal. These belong to two main families: Indo-Aryan and Tibeto-Burman. There are various levels of speaking the Nepali language: one level used for speaking to younger persons; one to people below oneself in status; one between equals; one between people who are older and above one's status; and another to the king and the royal family.

In 1968, 60 percent of the first graders in the Jewish school system of Israel were of Middle-Eastern or North African parentage (Feitelson, 1969). Only a quarter of these children complete primary school at the end of eighth grade. The different child rearing patterns, cultures, and values pose problems in the schools of Israal. Originally the education system in Israel was organized along western lines. Many of the children from different countries lack skills, aptitudes, and attitudes which are prerequisite for coping successfully with a western-type education system. The first and most dramatic result of the mass influx of nonwestern

children into a western-type education system was extremely widespread school failure. In most modern Hebrew schemes, the first meaningful words are structured and decoded by combinations of one consonant with one vowel. Introduction of further letters is sequenced in such a way that each new letter contributes further word combinations. In Israel, the child normally meets three kinds of letters during first grade. A simplified alphabet is used in the initial stage, ordinary print follows after a few months, and then cursive writing is introduced. The next few years the child will proceed to write without vowels. English is taught in the schools beginning in fifth grade and Arabic is introduced one or two years later (Feitelson, 1976).

There is quite alot of recent information about reading and literacy in Third World nations such as Iran (Carr and Carr, 1970), Egypt (Khater, 1967), Nigeria (Klein, 1977), and Ethiopia (Starr and Starr, 1978). Much of the information is on combating illiteracy in order to increase the prosperity of the nation. In general, these countries have a very low literacy rate and in order to understand their individual situations, the geography, social, political, and religious makeup must be understood. Cutler (1976) critically notes that few developing nations use paraprofessionals, volunteer tutors, or teacher aides in their efforts to improve the literacy levels of their people. With the exception of small numbers of peace corps type volunteers from industrialized nations, few educators of developing nations have initiated programs utilizing paraprofessions to supplement and support the activities of classroom teachers. One of the major reasons for the paucity of such programs is the lack of a literate reservoir from which to draw. It is evident that both adult literacy and improving early childhood education, reading readiness, and beginning reading must be attacked for progress to be made in Third World countries.

According to recent reports by UNESCO, the number of illiterates in many areas of Africa, Asia, and Latin America remains as high as 70, 80, or 90 percent of the total population. In many

countries, the female population is almost entirely illiterate. About 35 percent of the world's population is estimated to be unable to read at all, and at least 65 percent of the world's population is estimated to fall below the level of functional literacy (4th grade level). The struggle against illiteracy is one of the most important and also one of the most gigantic and demanding tasks of our present generation (Malmquist, 1973).

In Robert Thorndike's (1973) study of reading in fifteen countries, he concluded that there is a higher level of reading among students of developed countries which have a higher level of economic development than developing nations, and that home and family background greatly predict reading success. There is a consistency between these findings since developed countries are better able to provide an enriched environment in which parents are educated, books and magazines are available, and television and radio are assessable to all children. He concluded that good environmental backgrounds provide strong differentiation between countries and within countries, and between students of different comprehension levels.

Feitelson (1967) has studied the relationship between systems of writing and the teaching of reading and discusses five features of writing systems related to the teaching of beginning reading:

1. Alphabetic versus Nonaphabetic Writing
   It has been recognized for many years that the problems faced by students learning to read in a language which is not written alphabetically are entirely different from those faced by students learning to read alphabetic scripts.

2. Reading Direction
   What is the effect of the direction in which different languages are written and read? Some languages read from top to bottom, others from left to right, and others from right to left.

3. The Number of Letters
   The number of visual symbols needed in order to commit the spoken word to paper may have an effect on learning to read. Although it is easier to learn a small number of letters, are all the variations of spoken sounds in a language represented by the letters?

4. Sound - Symbol Correspondence
   What is the effect of the correspondence between sounds used in speaking and the letters representing these sounds in writing?

5. Visual Qualities of Scripts
   What is the effect of word shapes and letter resemblance on learning to read?

Philp (1971) also discusses the relationship between language and orthography. The old Chinese script has no phonetic relationship whatsoever to the spoken language which children use. He questions: "Are they learning to read in the same sense as children learn to read in western - type alphabets?" The reading process, and hence the readiness may be quite different.

Among many factors to be considered by a teacher when forming his/her approach to reading instruction is the nature of the language as written down. Most languages are written in alphabetical form and a major conclusion is that an analytic approach is justified for beginning reading instruction, followed by teaching phonics and introducing synthetic means of identifying words (Larsen, 1967).

Malmquist (1975) urges that more cross - national studies be conducted to determine successful procedures and to find answers to current questions. He mentions that our knowledge of the various aspects of primary reading is still very limited and recommends comparative studies of different methods of instruction in beginning reading, involving countries with varying ages of school entrance, ranging from five to seven. Malmquist also poses the following kinds of questions: (1) Is it easier for beginners to learn to read a language that has a more regular letter - sound correspondence? (2) Will disadvantaged groups profit by an earlier age of school entry? (3) In what ways will the efficiency of a particular method of combination of methods in learning to read vary with language structure, background of the child, and age of school entry? Malmquist states:

> Such a cross- national study's implications for educational practice will contribute to a better basis for decision-making of some vital issues of primary reading. The age of school entrance, for instance, and its implications

for achievement are not readily studied within countries, so the cross-national comparison will lead to a better assessment of this factor. It is not only a question of which entrance age produces the highest reading attainment at the age of nine years, but also a question of possible differences as to the learning sequence among groups of children who start learning to read at different ages.

There are a wide variety of questions that need answers relating to preschool education, readiness, and beginning reading. Cooperation on an international scale in an interdisciplinary way, can provide us with some answers to the continuing demand for better education in all countries. All people should be allowed the opportunity to learn to read so they may enjoy lifelong learning, continuing education, and reading for recreation, and also become active participants and contributors in their own society and culture.

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